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WHY YOUR MANUSCRIPTS RETURN

By "A READER"
(Alexander Good.)

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Why Your MSS. Return.

Introduction.

IT may be supposed that the Guide Posts along the road to literary success are already sufficiently numerous. Whence comes, then, this enormous mass of crude, undigested material with which the "Literary Reader" has to wage an unending struggle?

An outpost, beyond the furthest advanced guard of the Publishing Army, this Reader has to cope with the first onslaught of the literary beginner (often termed in dreadful phrase "literary aspirant"), and it is a matter of surprise

to find him almost invariably with an imperfect knowledge of the weapon he proposes to wield.

The Reader who should set his judgment within a hundred miles of infallibility, has undoubtedly many shocks in store for him, and it were well for all of us to remember the dreadful legend of our Greatest Author having condemned the first book of our other Greatest Author.

The aim set up for the present publication is a very modest one. It proposes only to indicate the faults which chiefly disfigure the MSS. of beginners, and to suggest appropriate remedies.

For the sake of convenience I have divided my remarks on Fiction Writing into the following sections, viz.: (1) Plot, (2) Construction, (3) Characterisation, (4) Dialogue, (5) Atmosphere. These headings follow the form into which my reports on the books submitted to me customarily fall; it will be observed that the magic word "Style" is omitted, but a few remarks on that subject will be appended.

FICTION WRITING.

THE "Golden Rule" for success in fiction writing may be put thus—*Have a story to tell, and tell it straightforwardly, with conviction, in the best language at your command.*

Remember that from the dawn of speech, right down to the present moment, in every country, there has always been an audience for the person with the story to tell, and ability to tell it, whether Saga Maker, Jongleur, Minnesinger, Troubadour, or Novelist.

To take the first of my headings :

I.—Of the Plot. Have a Story to Tell.

THE initial step is to make up your mind what is to be the central thread of your story. This would appear a truism so obvious as scarcely to be worth stating afresh, yet, to judge from many of the MSS. I see, one might imagine that the writers sat down in front of a

large packet of clean paper, in the hope that a Plot would develop itself as they wrote. Possibly they have had in mind the nebula of an idea, and having fixed on what they deemed a suitable character, or incident, they have proceeded to write round it.

This may be a safe method for the born writer, the genius who arrives a very few times in a century, but it is most certainly not the road to success for the ordinary writer ; nor is it even for the genius the safest and easiest path. The wise general studies his maps when ordering his battle, and the wise author will first write down his central theme in full detail—and the more expanded his preliminary sketch, the easier will be his subsequent work.

What Plot to select ? Here the author has the widest possible field to range over. The world lies before him to wander whither he may ; nor is he even bounded by *this* world. The universe is his ; he may wing his way into the remotest Solar Systems, soar into Heaven,

descend into Hell—to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, the furthest future, the most distant past are his for the choosing.

It signifies little that any part of his selected "claim" has been worked by a previous "miner"; possession is the whole law, and ability to work the only title. On the whole, wisdom counsels the selection of a central theme upon which the writer has actual first hand knowledge, or can obtain full information. Many authors fail in attempts to juggle with worlds, who might succeed brilliantly were they content to deal with their own street or village.

I must confess a strong personal preference for fiction dealing with *realities*, the probable, the possible. To name an instance. I find H. G. Wells more readable when he is revealing a Hoopdriver, or a Kips, than when he is visiting the Moon, or entertaining a few callers who have just dropped in from Mars.

It would appear, however, that there is a large Public interested in the impossible, the

occult, the outrageous; yet it is well to remember that "David Harum," a plain story of every-day life, ran over the English-speaking peoples like an epidemic, whilst "David Copperfield" will probably be read in days when ——— and ——— have departed into the unknown.

Whatever then the subject selected, let it be one which the writer *is competent to deal with in all its developments.*

II.—Construction.

HAVE a story to tell, *and tell it straightforwardly.*

Construction is the most important element of the writer's craft; in fact it may be said in a great measure to constitute the craft. A writer who, with a good story to tell, fails in its construction, resembles a wandering raconteur, and so much depends on it that no amount of time devoted to constructing a story can be deemed to be wasted.

A thoroughly well-constructed story will write itself, whereas a loosely-constructed one will give

the writer endless trouble, and when finished is quite likely to fail in securing publication.

Construction is discipline, the orderly unrolling of incidents, the proportion of the parts, the gradual drawing together of interests, and the intensification up to a climax.

It is probably a very moderate estimate that at least ninety per cent. of the failures are due to faulty construction.

Common faults are that writers

(*a*) begin before the right moment;

(*b*) continue after the interest has ceased;

(*c*) wander away into by-roads and bridle-paths;

(*d*) build on insufficient foundations;

(*e*) give undue importance to subordinate characters or incidents;

(*f*) drag in long descriptions for love of fine writing or fancy for a particular locality;

(*g*) or mark time, simply to fill up space.

It is advisable to introduce no element that does not help forward the development of the

story, and scenery which is intended to have no special influence on character or incident should be sketched very rapidly.

Word painting is much admired in many quarters, yet it is certain that for one reader who struggles through a page of sunset nine will skip it and get on with the story.

Possibly when a writer has carved his own little niche in the Temple of Fame, he may be able to consult his special fancies in many respects. The average writer will, however, be more likely to carve such a niche if he will, in the celebrated phrase, "cut the cackle and come to the 'osses."

Endeavour to grip the reader's interest, at starting, with the very first word. Give him an exhilarating plunge into deep water at once, instead of making him wade in gradually from the beach.

In the old spacious days when books were few, and life not so hurried, a novelist could afford to waste a few pages, or even chapters, in gradually

placing his characters on the stage: to-day a quicker movement is necessary.

Keep something from the reader's knowledge until the end. This "something," especially in a serial, should concern the main interest. Guard against an anti-climax.

In the actual labour of construction it is useful to make the first sketch on a large card, or sheet, in such a way that the interdependence of the various parts can be seen at a glance. If this sheet be ruled into as many spaces as there are chapters contemplated in the book, and the chief incidents of each chapter summarised in one space, a very fair idea will be derivable as to whether the construction is sound or otherwise.

Possibly one practical experiment in this respect will have more weight than volumes of explanations, and for writers who love their craft and have the time and will to study it, there could be no better lesson than to take an admittedly well-constructed book and pull it to pieces, first summarising the plot as though the

idea were your own and the book one you contemplated writing, then ruling a large sheet into as many divisions as there are chapters, and placing in each division the salient points of one chapter in order to observe their relation to the main thread and their inter-relation with each other.

Among the classics, *Great Expectations* and *Esmond* may be named as affording sound examples, and of the work of living writers, *The Story of Bessie Costrell.*

It may be objected that this amounts to a suggestion that by the observation of certain mechanical rules it is possible for anyone to produce a saleable novel. Well, provided the work so produced is readable it matters little. Nevertheless, the number of those who have the time and inclination to submit to the drudgery of writing is so small that the output is not likely to become suddenly overwhelming.

III.—Of Characterisation.

HAVE a story to tell; tell it straightforwardly and *convincingly*. Here we leave the field of mechanics for a region in which a writer is able to move with greater freedom.

Much modern fiction may be said to have little concern with character drawing, the figures of many stories being only puppets which the author moves about at his will, indistinguishable from each other save by their labels, and acting without regard to anything but the exigencies of the story.

Even though books written on such lines are successful it is not safe to follow a bad precedent. That one jerry builder has escaped detection and retired on a fortune, is not warrant for others to engage in the same pursuit. It is far wiser to play the game according to the rules, and it is another truism to point out that the soundest and most enduring literary reputations have been built up by the practitioners who pay attention to the principles of their art.

The main feature of characterisation should

certainly be consistency within wide limits. Wide, because, although it is impossible to predicate exactly what a particular character will do in special circumstances, it is quite possible to judge correctly nine times out of ten. To take a simple instance, a niggard will refuse alms to a beggar on three hundred and sixty-four days, yet on the remaining day he *may* bemoved by some unusual impulse and surprise by his generosity.

It is this very possibility that adds piquancy to life, and affords the literary artist an opportunity for variety ; still, the necessity for consistency remains, and according as the persons of a story act in consonance with their characters, so it is convincing, or the reverse.

The fashion of writing *about* the characters is almost exploded. Far greater artistry is displayed if they are permitted to reveal themselves, as no amount of writing round them will render them lifelike and convincing, unless their actions are the artistic outcrop of their qualities ; while, if their

actions convince, the accessory writing is superfluous.

The same rules of proportion must be observed in dealing with characters as are followed in the general construction. It frequently happens that for some personal reason the author is tempted to lavish particular care on a minor character. It may be himself or a special friend whom he desires to hold up for admiration, or an enemy he wishes to pillory, or the character may grow under his hand from sheer pleasure in the working, yet should he permit it to occupy more space in the book than is warranted by its relations to the story as a whole he is offending against the canons of art.

There never was, and never will be, any law which cannot be infringed, and that successfully, by genius, and the novice, looking only at the happy result, if tempted to hazard the same flight, will certainly realise the inadequacy of his wings and come heavily to earth.

It is useful, when the Plot and Construction

are settled, to make a short sketch of each of the leading characters in order to get them firmly impressed on the mind. This should then be compared with the sketch of the Construction to make sure that none of them are cast for actions at any point of the story at variance with their natures.

(The remarks as to Plot and Construction do not refer to what must be deemed the higher form of the Fictional Art—that is, the novel of Character as distinct from the "yarn" or story mainly of incident; in the former the character sketch and the plot would be synonymous.)

To sum up, Characterisation should be

(*a*) clearly defined;

(*b*) consistent;

(*c*) proportionate.

By the observance of these rules the illusion of life will be secured, as distinct from a Marionette Show or Shadowgraph Exhibition.

IV.—Of Dialogue.

HAVE a story to tell and tell it straightforwardly and *convincingly*.

Dialogue is one of the most important materials that goes to the filling in of the skeleton of Plot and Construction. The proportion the Dialogue will bear to the whole story varies according to the nature of the work. If too much space be allotted to it the result is weakness and frothiness, if too little the cake may be heavy and doughy.

Dialogue should in all cases grow naturally out of the interweaving of character and incident, while at the same time illuminating and helping this on. It must, above everything, be not only germane, but indispensable to the story.

To say this is to set up a high standard, as there are few books from which something might not be lopped without injury to the body, yet the nearer the standard is approached the stronger will be the grip on the reader.

Much modern fiction suffers from what may be termed "Epigramitis," the determination of

the author to be smart at any cost, and the story is frequently permitted to halt while the characters belabour each other with brilliant, or other, epigrams. It cannot be denied that this affords often enough very charming reading, and that it is at times justified of its own cleverness; the average reader, however—the god who sends the book into its hundred and fiftieth thousand—is not greatly concerned with "sorbets," he wants beef and pudding. Himself not given to epigram, in his fiction he is bewildered by, and resents it. Unless, therefore, it helps forward the story, or is necessary to a character, it is a hindrance to be eschewed.

To refer once again to the Niche you may be pictured as seeking: when you have won it, and your royalties are embarrassingly large, cultivate your epigrams with your sea-kale, your asparagus, and other luxuries; until then it is safe to keep them well in hand.

One of the most important features of dialogue is that it should be natural and *life*like, not

necessarily a photographic reproduction. The ordinary conversation of life is dull, trivial, and hopelessly uninteresting ; it is the illusion of life, rather than its absolute portrait the writer seeks.

Long speeches constitute a common error of young writers, as do narrations of incidents previously recounted. Stiffness, inflation, wordiness, are to be avoided. Much can be done by suggestion and elision.

Dialogue then should be—

(*a*) crisp ; (*c*) varied ;
(*b*) simple ; (*d*) relevant.

Dialect may be considered under this head, although it is related, as well, to atmosphere. The wisest course is not to attempt the introduction of vernacular without special knowledge, or the result will be ludicrous.

Particular acquaintance with their material characterises the work of the writers who have made a success with this weapon, as Thomas Hardy or Walter Raymond. On the other hand the failures are numerous ; instance the

popular lady who depicted a London gutter-child talking of "t'owd passon." There is also a terrible mosaic to which writers, weak in vernacular, sometimes resort when they desire to present an illusion of the country. It may be termed generically "rustic," and is a fearful hybrid, to be avoided rigidly. The following is a suggestion of the kind of material referred to: "Noa, oi deawn't knaa hanythink abeawt it masell' lass. Oi kin see you'm unkid straange i' these 'eer pairts, yess inteet to gootness"; and this, from a London morning paper, purporting to represent the Welsh dialect, is a finer example of how not to do it than any artificial specimen one could invent: "Ar've booked to Chester—here's ma rail ticket. But ar'm in Newport. Ar met a friend when the train stopped somewhere—we hud a drink—and they changed tha train while we were inside. Hwhats arl these flags for here?"

Anyone with a good ear, and a sense of observation, ought to be able to acquire a working knowledge of one or two dialects with-

out difficulty; yet, however well one may be equipped in this respect, vernacular should be employed sparingly by the novice, and it should not be of a nature too recondite for easy reading.

V.—Of Atmosphere.

THE word atmosphere, which is applied in its restricted sense to the general air of a book, as cheerful, gloomy, sprightly, or sinister, is here intended to have a wider application; it may be likened to the cement, run in among the stones of an edifice, binding them together, and unifying them into one harmonious whole. The element in which the characters move and breathe, or stifle and die, according as it is or is not successfully realised.

It concerns the unities of time, place, and action; it "joins the flats." The more clearly the writer mentally realises his atmosphere, the more convincing will be his presentation. It is

not sufficient, however, that he should carry it in his mind ; he must present it on his paper in such a fashion that the reader is able to share it.

In this connection the difference between essential and non-essential needs to be watched closely, or description may degenerate into cataloguing, realism descend to banality.

Mistakes are not the sole property of literary beginners. They are to be found with fair frequency in the works of practised hands, especially to-day, when the ambition of the really popular author would appear to be a book a month.

They are easily to be avoided by care for craftsmanship and vigilance, by encouragement of the author's sense of pleasure in the doing of his work, and in the dignity of the work done.

Macaulay, according to his biographer, "extended his indefatigable industry and his scrupulous precision to the minutest mechanical drudgery of the literary calling !"

There is an example, in another medium, of Constable, who spent days taking careful

drawings of the most ordinary objects. Gainsborough did the same, as did Rembrandt. A pig, a dog, an old peasant was of interest to him.

If these Masters found it advisable to devote time and labour to the minutiæ of their art, the inferior workman or novice will surely not find it wasted effort to do the same.

As an instance of inattention to detail, take the popular writer who permitted a solicitor to draw up a will under which he was practically the sole beneficiary. Two minutes' conversation with a competent Counsel would have shown him that such a will was waste paper.

He would perhaps retort that the public do not care about such details, *that they buy his stories* ; yet he is possibly mistaken. There are hundreds of readers to whom such a mistake must be apparent in a moment ; and the author's power is certainly lowered in their eyes.

Much can be done by the use of works of reference, maps, directories, and consultation of authorities to gain correct atmosphere.

Say that a medical detail has to be presented. It is not a matter of great difficulty to submit the point to a doctor, and how much more convincing to present such a detail correctly, rather than to guess at it, and incur the liability to blunder.

The provision of adequate motives concerns construction as well as atmosphere; yet proper attention to this, in the smallest detail, will secure conviction in the reader's mind.

A specimen error follows from a brisk, readable novel, recently submitted. The Hero had a fortress committed to his charge, with particular instructions from his Sovereign to exercise the utmost vigilance in watching the inmates. In order, however, that certain events desired by the author should come about, the Hero *took it in to his head* to ride forth, and later allowed himself to be drugged while away from his duty. This inadequacy of motive was fatal to the sense of reality.

Another specimen presented the Hero setting off into a mountainous region with a guide, who incontinently deserted him. For five weeks

that Hero wandered, living on biscuits. On a moderate computation he must have carried with him at starting seven large boxes of biscuits.

Titles and modes of address seem to present difficulties to the novice. A *Baronet's* son was recently presented as the *Honourable Bertie* at the *Rectory* of a *Parish* in one of the *Western States of America* (this is a combination hard to beat). An Earl's son was indifferently Lord Nosoo, and Lord William Nosoo, while a Viscount, upon whom a Duke called to ask for his daughter's hand, addressed his prospective son-in-law as "My Lord Duke," saying, "Pray be seated, your Grace." This, too, in a story of to-day.

These are perhaps extreme instances; yet such carelessness is almost criminal when information can be so easily obtained.

Atmosphere, then, should be

(*a*) truthful; (*b*) fully presented;
(*c*) without excessive elaboration.

Other forms of literary endeavour likely to engage the beginner are the Short Story and the Article.

OF THE SHORT STORY.

THIS is perhaps the most popular medium; the field is apparently so wide, and the task presents a specious air of ease. Could the novice form only a distant idea of the enormous amount of work of this kind that is floating about, seeking an outlet, he would hesitate long before deciding to add his quota to the total.

It is impossible to blame a beginner for drawing erroneous conclusions, seeing how many stories are published daily, weekly, and monthly, which are dull, trivial, slipshod, ungrammatical, stale, vulgar, wearisome. He is, no doubt, a reader before he is a writer, and he opines that it must be an easy matter to produce better work, and sell it.

The former proposition is possibly simple; the latter is exceedingly difficult. The first obstacle is provided by the authors with names, which to a large extent sell a magazine or journal. The editor in search of magnets will

commission stories, say, rrom Sarah Jane Jones, Egbert Tittlemouse, and Bigge Potte ; and these great writers fill the chief seats. Next come the writers of lower rank, whose work is competent and reliable. Following these are the celebrities whose names are big enough to call attention to their wares. Afterwards come the writers with personal claims of blood, or friendship, and the amateurs who have had one or two interesting experiences. Should any space remain after the wants of these bodies have been met, the serious literary workman has a chance of attention, and, in passing, one may say that he will be serious indeed ere his day arrives.

It is also advisable to consider whether the rewards are likely to be commensurate with the outlay. Good ideas, situations, characters, are not too abundant. The payment for short stories by new hands is not excessively liberal. Is it worth while then to give freely of one's stock for a very precarious return, carrying with it no elements of permanence ? For the writers

who have made a name by their short stories are few indeed.

Should the writer persist in attempting the Short Story, the same artistic principles will be found to apply as rule other work. There should be a strong central interest ; there is room for nothing irrelevant, while the characters should be few and well marked, the dialogue crisp and to the point.

Generally it is wise to avoid very gloomy subjects, and the display of strong passions, which are not viewed with favour. Unless catering for a special public, do not be too subtle ; finesse is likely, in the eye of the strenuous editor, to be mistaken for weakness. Be very shy of indulging a satirical humour, and do not attack popular prejudices.

These errors are all possible when your position is assured. For a beginner a simple domestic story, with a love interest, developed in a bright atmosphere, is likely to be most saleable.

OF THE ARTICLE.

TO write a readable article it is necessary to have (*a*) special knowledge of some subject, interesting either inherently or by reason of momentary prominence, or (*b*) the particular literary gift which enables its owner to select the interesting points in his subject and present them in a delectable shape.

Of these two possessions the latter is by far the more precious, as it is entirely useless to bubble over with special knowledge unless you can put it on paper in an attractive form.

How many articles are submitted of extreme interest to the writer's family and friends, yet absolutely without a vestige of concern for the general public? Others are written round material which is itself highly interesting, yet owing to the manner in which it is presented, the interest has evaporated, and all that is left is the skeleton, as though a cook should send the bones to table and throw away the soup.

Doubtless this arises from the inability of the author to put on paper what he has in his mind. He adds his written word to his mental picture, and deems himself to be presenting the combination to the reader as a whole, while in reality the vital portion has remained in his brain.

This power of adequate presentation is *the* literary gift, lacking which it is impossible to win success as an author. Nevertheless, it is probably more widely distributed than is often supposed, and is susceptible of development by practice and training, in common with other faculties.

In setting out to write an article the beginner will be wise to proceed on regular mechanical lines. First he should fix approximately the length. Then he should note his points briefly. When he feels that he has omitted nothing, he should, from his points, construct a skeleton; finally, when he is satisfied, proceeding to clothe it with flesh and blood, and, if possible, infuse into it the breath of life. In this manner his work will grow under his hand, and he is far

more likely to secure due proportion and the adjustment of the parts than he would be if he proceeded to work straight from the ground without previously planning the work.

OF POETRY.

THE openings for the publication of poetry available to the novice are few indeed, so few that he need hardly anticipate any other reward for his efforts than the pleasure derivable from the work itself.

There is a considerable sub-stratum of truth in the representation by the humorists of the Editor's traditional attitude to the Poet, largely due to the Poet's own lack of perception and tact. The poetical faculty would appear to be incompatible with the power of realising things as they are. The Poet is often so permeated by the beauties of his own work—to him the one thing lovely in a drab world—that he will insist on pointing them out to Editors and Publishers, failing, apparently, to realise that, however keen their love of the beautiful, they have other duties than that of listening to poetry.

Within a few days it has been the writer's hap to hear the opinion of three publishers and one

agent on poets. To reduce their expressions to a common formula, it may be stated that they would prefer to visit the dentist rather than meet a poet carrying a bag of MSS.

There are hardly a dozen writers in the country for whom a publisher could be found to undertake the cost of a volume of poems. Poets, therefore, must expect to bear the expense of publication themselves. This is axiomatic in the trade to such an extent that it will not be worth while for the poet to submit his work in any other expectation.

OF STYLE.

HAVE a story to tell, and tell it straightforwardly and convincingly, *in the best language at your command.*

The writer who has developed a genuine care for style will not require any hints, and space will not permit more than the enumeration of a few of the common faults which should not be permitted to disfigure even a schoolboy's essay, and are yet found in too many a popular novel.

They may be enumerated as follows :—

(*a*) The Cliché. In conversation we are apt to use the stereotyped expression, and a beginner sees no reason why he should not write in the same manner. "Needless to say," "of course," "literally," "conspicuous by its absence," "regained terra firma," "as a matter of fact," "better imagined than described," "suiting the action to the word," "hoping against hope," "if the worst comes to the worst," and "galore," are a few examples of the worn-out locutions which should be absolutely excluded.

(*b*) The split infinitive—that is, the division of the verb in the infinitive mood from its "sign" by the intrusion of an adverb. It is necessary to be a little particular, seeing that a well-known playwright and journalist recently confessed in his paper that he did not know what a "split infinitive" was.

(*c*) Such solecisms as "and which," "so as," the use of a conjunction to begin a new sentence, the form "wherever," and its allies as queries.

(*d*) Phrases which in addition to being stereotypes are also nonsense. Thus the expression "he hissed" is perpetually used by melodramatic writers to express a low tense voice, and in nearly all the instances I have examined it is applied to words which could not by any possibility be "hissed." The word "hiss" is tied down by its very onomatopœic origin to one form of employment, and only words largely composed of sibilants can be hissed. "It is Cissie's" is hissable; "Go, go, they are dead!" is not. Another example is the combination of

"literally" with other words to form rank nonsense. Thus one read recently in a popular serial that one of the characters "literally exploded," from which sentence might be deduced—shall I say the hope—that this character was to disappear from the book for ever. The author had, however, no such merciful intention; he simply intended to convey "loud laughter."

(*e*) Monotony of form. It is so easy to fall into a routine sentence that every effort should be made to secure pliability and variation.

Here is an instance of a form, in itself almost intolerable, which was peppered over the pages of a recent MSS. until it became as wearisome as neuralgia. "Faithful and true she was," "Beautiful that wood was," "Very considerate he had been," "Broad the balustrade was." This is undoubtedly the offspring of the style, which, springing up originally in the "fashionable intelligence," has since been given houseroom by novelists. "Very charming looked the Duchess," or "Very graceful is Mrs. Smith."

Whilst searching ever for an extended vocabulary, and variety of phrase, clarity must not be sacrificed. The language requires to be beautiful indeed that will excuse obscurity, and sound construction of the main fabric is of greater importance to the novice than over elaboration of the detail.

It will be helpful to remember that words are *coins*, not *counters*.

In the actual labour of production the search for the fittest phrase may be found a hindrance to the capture of an elusive thought, and wisdom counsels on such occasions the jotting down in the rough of the ideas as they arise, to be polished subsequently.

It cannot be supposed that even so great a master as George Meredith has habitually produced his sentences in the form which they assume on the printed page, while it is a commonplace that Tennyson tried his phrases again and again, until he reached, if not absolute satisfaction, at least the nearest possible approach to perfection.

OF THE MANUSCRIPT.

THE work being written, and revised until it is satisfactory, what is to happen to it ?

The first necessity is that it should be typed. A novice cannot expect that his work shall receive consideration unless it conform with custom.

It should accordingly be clearly typed, on good quality quarto paper, and each page should carry about twenty-five lines, which will render it pleasantly readable. Economy in the direction of crowding the page, or scamping the margin, is a mistake, as a Publisher's Reader may easily be prejudiced against a book if worried by any difficulty in deciphering it.

A final revise of the typescript is indispensable ; mistakes are certain to have arisen, and a further polish may be given to unsatisfactory parts.

Convenience in handling is also worth serious consideration, and there is no better plan

than to bind the sheets into one, or, if a very bulky MSS., two volumes, with stiff covers. Many MSS. are sent out bound and stitched. Against this there is one objection from the author's side: the difficulty in making alterations of any importance.

A better plan is to secure a loose cover; that of a disused letter copying book suits admirably. The sheets should then be pierced midway down the left margin, in three places, and laid in the cover, which has been pierced similarly through its hinges. Now with a bodkin pass ferret, or tape, through the topmost hole from front to back, return it through the middle hole, pass it now through the lower hole to the back, return again through the middle hole, and tie the ends, leaving just enough play in the binding material for the covers to open easily. If you procure half a yard of calico, paste it over the back, and turn it in, then decorate the inside or the cover with end papers, you provide a handy and strong volume, which will endure the

knocking about it will most certainly receive, and is at the same time a comfort to the Reader.

The most uncomfortable form is the MSS., composed of separate chapters, each joined with a paper fastener or a pin, with the chance of the most important chapter being lost. A little trouble in the presentation of the MSS. will very surely bring its own reward to the young writer.

OF THE NOTE BOOK.

THIS is one of the most important tools of the literary workman, whose stock in trade can be said to consist entirely of ideas.

These have a way of presenting themselves at all kinds of inconvenient moments ; nevertheless, they should be, if possible, secured at once. A suggestion for a plot, a character, a situation, an epigram, a happy phrase, any one of these flits before the mind, and unless it be secured in the note book is liable to vanish for ever. Once crystallised into ink or pencil it is always at the writer's command.

That the value thus set on ideas is not exaggerated may be gathered from a comparison of the Bab Ballads with the subsequent librettos of the Savoy operas. Mr. Gilbert knew a good thing when he had it, and extracted its full value. Charles Lamb, also, in his correspondence, would make use of the same idea in several letters, and in some cases employ it in an essay as well. Therefore be advised and *fix your idea when it comes.*

OF PLACING THE MANUSCRIPT.

THE MSS. being typed and bound, what is the writer to do with it? Shall he send it out himself or shall he entrust it to the hands of an agent?

Arguing by analogy from the other affairs of life the latter course would appear to be the wiser. By far the greater number of leading writers find it advantageous to employ an agent, and the novice surely need not hesitate to follow where they lead.

The competent agent has these advantages:—

(*a*) He is better able to judge the merits of a work than the writer.

(*b*) He will waste no time in submitting it in unlikely channels.

(*c*) He has knowledge of openings which cannot, in the ordinary way, be known to authors.

(*d*) He has intimate relations with editors and publishers.

(*e*) He is able to suggest alterations or amendments to render a book more saleable.

(*f*) He is paid mainly by commission, and is, therefore, anxious to obtain the best price.

(*g*) Greatest comfort of all, the agent softens the blows of rejection, which are so heartrending to a young writer.

The charges of the different agencies vary, comprising usually a preliminary fee ranging from one to five guineas per annum for reading and reporting, together with a commission averaging about 10 per cent. on the returns.

Before entering into relations with any agency, however, or submitting material, make full enquiries as to its standing, reputation and capabilities.

Should the author decide to dispense with an agent he will find it advisable to make a careful study of the class of book undertaken by the various publishers or bought by the newspapers for serial use. He must not fail to provide also for the return of his MSS. in case of rejection, by enclosing stamped addressed envelopes or sufficient stamps to pay the postage, and as publishers accept no responsibility for loss or

damage, he should, in the first typing, have a carbon duplicate made, of which the extra cost is inconsiderable.

It may not appear credible yet it is notorious in literary circles that a few editors exist to whom it is not safe to submit a good idea, seeing that they will descend so low as to appropriate it without any kind of acknowledgment: a form of piracy difficult to prove and impossible always to obviate.

There are several publishers who make a speciality of producing works of fiction at the author's expense. Any offer of publication on these terms must be viewed with the utmost caution. If a book be worth publishing at all, it is generally worth while for the publisher to take the risk.

A deceased writer gave the following impromptu reply when consulted on such a case:—

"Let the author auth;
The publisher, let him pubble;
Let him supply the cash,
And you the brains and trouble."

If the book have not sufficient merit to warrant the publisher incurring the risk incidental to his business, it is almost certainly not worth the author's while to put any money behind it. Such publishers produce a specious, a very specious, argument. They say: "If I produce this book for you and boom it into a success you are a made man. Why should I make you?" The counter argument is clear. The publisher of a successful novel will secure a large proportion of the profit, and he is quite able to hold on to his share of the boom by stipulating for the first refusal of a certain number of succeeding works from the same pen. This is invariably done by one well-known publisher, and it must be admitted that his stipulation has something to be said for it.

As a rule these offers to publish fiction on terms are only flat-catching propositions, and can be best described from the publisher's standpoint by the schoolboy's saying: "Heads I win, tails you lose."

A MS. was recently submitted for my opinion which was so helplessly, hopelessly impossible as almost to bring tears at the thought of the months of wasted effort and futile aspirations it represented, yet it was accompanied by an intimation that a publisher had offered to bring it out if the author would contribute £60 as his share of the cost.

There are undeniable instances where it has paid an author to bear the whole cost of publishing a novel, and if any writer should enjoy the fortunate circumstances of being able to afford the risk (in consideration of the whole of the profits less the publisher's commission), let him stipulate that the transaction shall be subject to the audit of an expert.

On no grounds should this clause be omitted from the agreement. Recently a publisher, well known in transactions of this nature, submitted to an author an account showing a deficit of over £50, with a request for a cheque to balance. The author called in an expert, who proved that

instead of a deficit having arisen, the balance in favour of the author was considerably in excess of £50, and under a threat of legal proceedings the publisher was constrained to pay.

To sum up the position, the arguments in favour of employing an agent so far outweigh those to the contrary that no one contemplating a serious attack on the literary world can be deemed wise to dispense with an agent for the sake of the small charge involved.

FINALLY.

DO not be tempted to resign your ordinary occupation to take up the literary life, unless you have at your command sufficient capital to render you independent in the event of failure.

The prospect of escaping from uncongenial drudgery is so delightful; the sight of the flowery meads of literature, with the favoured children sporting under the shadow of Parnassus so enticing, that the temptation occasionally oversets judgment. Remember, though, that there are very many claimants for admission through a very narrow doorway, to which merit is not by any means a ready passport, and that, even though you are immediately successful, the remuneration is not gorgeous.

By an agreement, passing through the writer's hands this very day, a very well-known novelist handed over to a leading firm of publishers every possible kind of right in a long novel for—

ONE HUNDRED POUNDS. Possibly it was poor stuff; possibly she has over-produced; perhaps there were other reasons for the low price. Yet One Hundred Pounds was all the book realised.

A novice selling a book outright might get from Twenty to Forty Pounds, or he might not. Therefore, hold on to your certainty, your salary, your business, whatsoever it may be, until your success is absolutely assured.

L'ENVOI.

Now the great need for the novice is patience, patience—and again, patience; and he may be sure that if his work be meritorious, it will eventually secure publication.

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